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# HOW TO PROTECT A CITY FROM CRIME.

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A DISCUSSION in the public prints of the ways and means of preventing crime is not altogether free from danger. For one of the most important of these is the preservation of absolute secrecy on the part of the men whose business it is to protect the people and their property from criminals. To expose therefore in detail the methods of the police would be impracticable here. It would do no good and it might do considerable harm. The best that can be done in an article of this character is to deal with the subject in its larger aspects.

In the first place, it is now pretty generally understood that crime is greater in the larger cities than elsewhere. This is due, not merely to the fact that where a great number of people are gathered there is sure to be a larger number of criminals than where the community is less extensive, but to the attractions that large cities offer to those who live by preying upon their fellow-beings. In other words, criminals find more opportunities for the profitable exercise of their wits in the great centres; besides, they can elude detection more easily there. Consequently, it is of the greatest importance that the utmost vigilance be used to protect these places.

Not many years ago, New York city was infested with criminals of all kinds. It was impossible to walk along the streets without rubbing up against them; indeed, they were so numerous that they actually elbowed respectable people off the sidewalk. They consorted with politicians of a low order and with gamblers and the like, and they enjoyed such immunity from punishment that they developed a really amazing effrontery. It was felt that

radical measures must be taken to root them out and to protect the city against them. So radical measures were taken ; in a comparatively short space of time every one of these men was summoned to Police Headquarters and ordered to leave town and to keep away. They all left and most of them have kept away ; those who returned have had occasion to regret it. Such measures may seem harsh and unjust ; it may be thought cruel to arrest men on no specific charge and drive them from their place of residence. But the police knew what they were about when they did this ; they knew that these men were professional criminals, that their very presence in a city was a menace to its safety. At any rate, the proceedings caused New York to cease to be a hotbed of criminality, and transformed it into a place where self-respecting people could live without fear of public danger.

New York, however, has, of course, still to be protected with the utmost vigilance. Just as criminals flock to cities, so it is their tendency to flock in largest numbers to the largest city in the country. Consequently, New York is the place in which not only those in this country, but those who come here from abroad, would naturally like to congregate. When we consider the vast number of inlets and outlets that New York has—more than any other American city—the problem, how to keep it vigilantly guarded, is seen to be one of extraordinary difficulty.

For example, a foreign criminal flees to this country. He lands in New York, absolutely untrammelled, as free as the most law-abiding citizen in the land. If he were in Europe, he would be marked as a ticket-of-leave man, or he would be known to the police there, for the European police are very watchful ; or he would be checked by the passport system. But once on American soil, in New York city, is lost among two millions of people, and practically begins a new life. If he continues to lead a criminal life, he has possibly an added advantage over the police by following foreign methods of crime, with which they may not be familiar.

Within the past few years Europe has sent to us the most dangerous kind of criminal that exists at the present time—the Anarchist. It would surprise the American public very greatly if the number of Anarchists now in this country were published. When these men are hounded from their own lands they seem to gravitate here by a natural attraction, and most of them display

a fondness for taking up residence in New York city. To the police they present a peculiarly difficult problem, for they do not belong to the usual type of criminal and, as a rule, they are far superior in intelligence and education to most of the members of the criminal classes. Moreover, they use the most terrible forces of nature, forces that the ordinary criminal would not think of using. Among those I have talked with—and I have had very intimate relations with a great many of them—I have observed a religious, perhaps I would better say a fanatical, spirit. They have dedicated themselves heart and soul to their peculiar beliefs; and they, that is, the leaders among them, stop at nothing, not even death itself, in their efforts to put these beliefs into practice in terrorizing the community. I make particular mention of their “leaders,” for, as a matter of fact, only about one in ten of the Anarchists is really active; the others merely follow the guidance of the more daring spirits. It would be a mistake to suppose that when they leave the monarchical countries and come here they do not carry their revolutionary principles with them. They are opposed not merely to old forms of government, but to all government as we understand the term, and they would gladly destroy our republican government if they had an opportunity to do so. On arriving here, however, they find the authorities ready to meet them, and thus far they have been held well in check. In New York an incessant watch is kept upon them, and any move that they might make hostile to the well-being of the citizens would bring against them the full power of the law.

All this will serve to suggest a few of the difficulties which beset those whose duty it is to protect from crime a city like New York. These difficulties are enormous, but I believe that they can be overcome. The burden of the work rests, of course, upon the police, upon their alertness, their efficiency, and their discipline. It is upon their discipline that I lay the greatest stress; to do their work efficiently it is essential that they be thoroughly organized and under perfect control. Each policeman is assigned to a certain district, and on him the people in the district rely for protection. Now this protection does not consist merely in the arresting of those who attempt to commit crime or who have committed it; on the contrary, this is only a secondary part of their work. Their most important duty consists of *preventing* all attempts at crime. This, of course, can be done only by the

exercise of the most unrelenting vigilance. In the first place, each policeman must make himself thoroughly acquainted with everything concerning his district ; he must know the people and their habits ; he must find out, among other things, who those are that habitually remain away from home till late at night, or who appear on the streets early in the morning. The honest men who are obliged by their work to do this have no occasion to fear such vigilance, for, far from being an impertinent interference in their business, it is a protection to them. As a matter of fact, only those need fear the intrusions of the police who have themselves something criminal to conceal. On the incessant watching of each district by the policeman in charge of it, rests the entire protection of the citizens of a city. In my experience, I have found the exchanging of policemen from one district to another at intervals advantageous ; it broadens the man, removes him from any possible breaches of duty that might result from too close a familiarity with one district and one set of people, and is in every way beneficial to him in the exercise of his duty.

But, of course, no policemen, however vigilant they may be, are able to cope with all the crime in a great city. A keen-witted and conscientious detective force must co-operate with them. Such a region as Wall street, for example, possesses very great attractions to clever criminals in all great cities. It is important, therefore, that unusual methods be tried to protect it. Until within recent years, no less than eleven millions of dollars were stolen in Wall street. But since extraordinary efforts were made to prevent further stealing there, by the use of the detective force, the robberies have ceased. This illustrates the importance of a thorough detective service ; no city should neglect to keep this service up to the very highest standard.

One point of great importance in dealing with criminals is this : they must be kept as much as possible apart ; they must be prevented from organizing, and, if they are organized, the organization must be broken up. To accomplish this, the greatest skill is necessary ; they must be met on their own ground and beaten at every one of their games. No quarter should be shown them ; they should be made to feel that the heel of the law is upon them and that they are mere dust beneath it. In other words, they should be taught that they are utterly insignificant and that the law has them completely in its power. In this way

alone, I believe, can they be successfully dealt with. My experience has taught me to look upon criminality and criminals in a wholly practical way. I have no sympathy with those who regard the matter from the sentimental point of view, and who maintain that criminals, instead of being punished, should be won over to right living by love and kindness.

Before touching upon this subject, however, I want to make clear just what I mean by criminals. I distinguish between those who yield to temptation and commit one crime, and those who repeatedly commit crimes—those whom we know as “professional” or hardened criminals. With regard to the first class, I can say that they often deserve to be treated with leniency, for in this way they may be saved from ruin and from criminal lives; but with regard to the second class, I am of the opinion that it is impossible to reform them. They are sent to prison, not merely to be punished, but to serve as a warning to others; that is, their punishment is given chiefly as a preventive of other crime. When once a man serves a term in prison, I have very little hope for him; for while there he lives in a criminal atmosphere, he comes in contact with other prisoners, who talk to him about their crimes, and who teach him new ways of committing crime; so that he leaves the place more tainted than he was when he went into it. Yet I do not mean by this to cast a reproach upon any of our prisons. Our prison system is by no means ideal, but it is the best that has been devised so far, and prisons are necessary evils. The great danger from them, as I have already intimated, comes from the intermingling of the inmates. But this cannot be helped. Prisoners are human beings and therefore gregarious; if they were kept constantly in solitary confinement they would simply become mad.

As for the sentimental treatment of prisoners, I have, for many years, observed its workings very carefully, and I am convinced that it does them neither good nor harm. Those ladies who present prisoners with flowers are no doubt very kind-hearted and very well-intentioned; but their labors are wasted. The prisoners like to receive their visits, for they afford diversions to many monotonous lives; but when they go away, they are ridiculed by the very ones on whom they have spent their time and showered their gifts. Some of these ladies are given nick-names by the prisoners, who frequently refer to them by these names.

This will, perhaps, illustrate as well as anything else the way in which the prisoners regard them.

Those people who look at criminality from the sentimental point of view apparently do not realize that with hardened criminals it becomes a business, which they pursue very much as normal human beings pursue theirs. Indeed, from the psychological point of view, the criminal is a most interesting study: he is depraved, suspicious, and absolutely without honor; the proverb about "honor among thieves" has no foundation in truth. It should be borne in mind that the criminal class, though apparently exceedingly numerous, makes altogether only a very small proportion of the total population. The more people become educated, the fewer criminals there are. By this I do not mean that education of itself necessarily promotes morality, for I have known well-educated men, of good birth, too, who have been thoroughly dishonest and corrupt: but simply that the more intelligent a man becomes the more plainly he sees the risk he runs in committing a crime. The average criminal is utterly reckless; he does not stop to consider what will happen to him if he is caught in his law-breaking. As soon as he does stop to consider what the consequences of a crime that he thinks of committing will be, he shows that there are possibilities in him of becoming a law-abiding citizen. So it follows that one of the best ways of protecting a community from crime is by raising the standard of intelligence among its members.

A good deal is said nowadays about the causes of crime and about crime as a hereditary disease. I have observed that most of the crime committed in New York city is due chiefly to two causes, drink and environment. The first cause needs no explanation; perhaps the second does, as I wish to emphasize the distinction between heredity and environment. I have seen men so corrupt that it has seemed to me as if a tendency to commit crime must be in their blood; but, on the whole, I do not put much faith in the theory that criminals are born with an irresistible tendency to evil-doing. I know, however, that the children of criminals are very apt to become criminals themselves. As a rule, criminals try to conceal the character of their lives from their children; but when one of the parents disappears from home for three or four years at a time and when the home is the resort of other criminals, the children are always sharp

enough to see just how things stand and so they fall very naturally into vicious ways. In a great city it is supposed that poverty is also the cause of much of the criminality; but this is not the fact; such crime as it does cause is comparatively slight.

There is another great evil abounding in large cities that has puzzled good thinking men for hundreds of years—the social evil. In my work I have naturally had occasion to study this question, and I have come to the conclusion that it is the most baffling of all the kinds of crime with which the law has to deal; indeed, so baffling that I believe it cannot be exterminated. There are those who maintain that it ought to be regulated by the authorities, that it should be confined to a certain district in the city; but I do not agree with these theories. In my opinion it should be kept as far from the public view as possible; if it were relegated to any particular quarter in a city, it would simply create a plague spot, a marked place, which would thus be given a dangerous publicity and made a blot upon the community. These people who indulge in sensational crusades against the social evil take a fearful responsibility upon themselves, and, far from accomplishing any good, they do an untold amount of harm. In the first place, they are inexperienced; all they know about crime and criminals is purely theoretical. Many of them, moreover, are nothing less than fanatics. They drive the degraded from their own haunts and force them to hide among respectable people, where they are far more harmful than they were before, because they have greater opportunities to spread vice. Moreover, they cause to be disseminated in the public prints the most shameful accounts of vice, which cannot fail to do a great amount of injury. Tampering with the social evil is a very ticklish game. The more the public hears about it, the worse for the public. It is the business of the law and of the police, who are supposed to aid in the carrying out of the law, to protect the public; in my judgment, therefore, the police in their efforts to eradicate this crime must take particular care to keep it as far from public notice as possible.

On the whole, I believe that during the past twenty-five years a very distinct advance has been made in the protection of cities against crime. The law is more effectually enforced than it ever has been before, and the methods of prevention and detection have become much more skilful and effective. Extradition



treaties have now been made by the United States with nearly all the other countries in the world, and it is therefore most difficult for a criminal to elude justice. It must be confessed that under our system of government any system of police must be more or less handicapped. For example, in European countries, a criminal may be arrested and held by the authorities for a time in secret. In this country, however, such a course of procedure would be impossible. A prisoner is brought into court the very day of his arrest or the day after. This method of dealing with those who are accused of criminality has its advantage for the accused, and there is, of course, a measure of justice in it ; but, on the other hand, it often handicaps the police in the detection of crime and of its perpetrators, for secrecy is an important element in this work.

The publicity given to crime by our newspapers is also a frequent obstacle to the detection of it ; yet the papers, of course, render an incalculable amount of assistance in the ferretting out of malefactors in a great many cases. Publication is a warning to criminals ; but it is, besides, an appeal to the country for aid in detecting them. As soon as a criminal's description is given in the newspapers, thousands of people are on the watch for him. Consequently, at the present time, the means of detection of crime and of bringing its perpetrators to justice are remarkable. But, as I have already pointed out, detection is only a secondary consideration ; those improvements in the police system are most important which are in the direction of *preventing* crime ; and the more our reformers work in this direction the more practical will the results of their efforts be and the more beneficial to the community.

THOMAS BYRNES.